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Navy and Marine Corps Medical News
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MN010701. TRICARE eliminates prime co-pays for family members
From the TRICARE Management Activity

The 2001 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) contains great news for active duty uniformed service members and their families. One provision that's sure to please is the elimination of co-payments for active duty family members (ADFMs) enrolled in TRICARE Prime.

Active duty family members enrolled in TRICARE Prime will no longer have to make co-payments for the care they receive from their civilian providers. Currently, family of active duty members in pay grades E-1 to E-4 and pay grades E-5 and above pay \$6 and \$12, respectively, for such visits. In addition, family members' \$11 per day civilian inpatient charge is being eliminated, as is the \$11.45 per day family member rate for enrollees admitted to a military treatment facility. It is anticipated that this benefit will become available in April 2001.

Legislation included in the 2001 NDAA, such as the elimination of co-payments, is giving recruiters something to cheer about. As an employee benefit, TRICARE is quickly becoming what military leaders hoped it would: The world's best health care for the world's best military.

Active duty family members will still have to make pharmacy co-payments for the National Mail Order Pharmacy program and at network retail stores, but these charges are nominal. In addition, military treatment facilities continue to provide prescription drugs free of charge -- a huge cost saving available to all uniformed services beneficiaries.

In order to obtain the elimination of co-payments for care received from their civilian providers, TRICARE Prime enrollees must follow TRICARE Prime rules. For example, TRICARE Prime enrollees must normally obtain authorization from their primary care manager before seeking care from civilian providers. While they retain the right to seek civilian care without authorization from their primary care manager, the TRICARE Prime point-of-service charges will apply.

Family members who use the point-of-service option are responsible for paying the annual deductible of \$300 per member or \$600 per family, and 50 percent of the TRICARE allowable charge once the deductible is met. Family members also are responsible for any additional charges billed by the non-network provider, up to 15 percent above the TRICARE allowable charge (balance billing rule). Members are encouraged to consult with a health benefits adviser (HBA) or beneficiary counseling and assistance coordinator (BCAC) prior to using the point-of-service option.

The elimination of co-payments for active duty family members who see civilian providers is not only about cost. It's also about making the TRICARE benefit equal for those who see civilian versus military providers. In response to feedback from beneficiaries, TRICARE Prime is being re-designed to take the irritants out of the program. Cost is a big concern for beneficiaries, and the elimination of co-payments for active duty family members enrolled in Prime is a plus for customer satisfaction.

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MN010702. Balboa hosts international pain management clinic
By Doug Sayers, Naval Medical Center San Diego

Nearly 60 physicians from Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, New Zealand, and the United States traveled to Naval Medical Center San Diego recently to take part in the Third Annual Interventional Pain Management Workshop. The workshop, held at the Naval School of Health Sciences, focuses on cutting edge procedures to manage and minimize chronic pain.

This year's workshop featured five facets to pain management and treatment. Cryoneuroablation is a procedure that locates a nerve through continuous x-ray, then freezes the nerve to end the pain. This procedure has been a fixture at all three workshops. Conference attendees were able to participate in a hands-on demonstration conducted under the strictest scientific and safety standards.

Spinal endoscopy was another procedure offered. Spinal endoscopy uses a miniature camera inserted into the epidural space in the patient's back to visually locate adhesions that cause back pain.

A third procedure highlighted is from complementary medicine - acupuncture. U.S. Air Force colonel, and Balboa staff member, Richard Niemtzow, has been using the Asian medical treatment in the Medical Center Pain Clinic with impressive results. COL Niemtzow conducted sessions for the assembled physicians demonstrating the use and benefit of placing needles in specific areas of the body to treat pain. Navy Medicine has approved Dr. Niemtzow's protocol, studying the utility of acupuncture for certain types of pain management.

"This year's workshop was a tremendous success. Even after expanding the number of attendees we could accept, we had a rather long waiting list of those who wanted to participate," said CAPT Patrick Danaher,

anesthesiologist and conference director. "Having physicians from around the world come to Balboa for this workshop is testament to the quality of staff and level of work we do here," Danaher added.

"Each Pain Management Workshop we host acts as a force multiplier to get better pain management techniques out to patients who are in distress," said LCDR Mike McBeth, conference co-director.

Planning has already begun for next year's workshop and a list of interested physicians has been started. Drs. Danaher and McBeth expressed their hope that each workshop they host will take medicine closer to making pain... just a distant painful memory.

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MN010703. NNNMC patients now given an alternative to surgery

By J03 Cherri Boggs, NNNMC Bethesda Public Affairs

The National Naval Medical Center has added yet another specialty to its services by implementing the new Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service, which gives patients an alternative to surgery. It is headed by LCDR Mike Salas, Chief of PM&R Service, who is one of only seven PM&R specialty-trained physicians Navywide.

PM&R is a medical specialty that offers patients a non-surgical approach to pain, injury and disease caused by neuro-musculoskeletal disorders.

The service was implemented to provide assistance to patients with musculoskeletal problems such as arthritis, tendonitis and pain syndromes, or to patients who do not wish to have surgery or who are not surgery candidates. The services offered include musculoskeletal medicine, electrodiagnostic medicine and general rehabilitation.

Musculoskeletal medicine includes the evaluation of back or extremity problems. Each newly referred patient receives a body evaluation, which determines if additional treatments such as x-rays, MRIs or labs are needed.

Electrodiagnostic medicine includes the evaluation of nerve and muscle disorders such as carpal tunnel syndrome or pinched nerves. General rehabilitation includes the evaluation and management of functional limitations due to injury or disease. This includes neurologic patients who have suffered a stroke, or who have injuries that cause weakness, muscle imbalances or spinal cord injuries.

This service works hand-in-hand with clinics throughout the hospital -- most commonly orthopedics, neurology, neurosurgery, the pain clinic, physical therapy, chiropractics and occupational therapy.

According to Salas, PM&R Service works as a team to collaborate on inpatient consultation; primarily multi-trauma patients or patients with functional limitations such as difficulty walking as a result of nerve injury, muscle injury or burns.

"This service attempts to add a multi-disciplinary approach to the recovery of patients with complex medical problems," Salas explained.

"We want to provide some guidance, exercise and activities that may prevent problems from occurring in the future," Salas said. "Sometimes people fail to do the necessary things to prevent surgery. I want to provide people with appropriate aggressive, non-surgical management."

Although the PM&R service has been a part of NNNMC for less than one year, it has already treated a great number of patients. According to Salas, patients with spinal, muscle and neck pain are his most frequent visitors.

Patients who wish to receive PM&R services must be referred by electronic consult and call the appointment coordinator at (301) 295-6550 to schedule the appointment.

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MN010704. Great Lakes NR Fleet Hospital to host MOOTW Symposium
By LCDR Deborah Spulecki, NR Fleet Hospital Great Lakes

Naval Reserve Fleet Hospital Great Lakes, with the support of Naval Hospital Great Lakes, will sponsor a seminar in Chicago July 21 and 22 exploring the diverse roles of military medicine during Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW).

The symposium is open to active duty and reserve and civilian personnel interested in the many facets of MOOTW, including disaster relief, humanitarian operations, biological terrorism, information warfare, chemical warfare and other potential non-combat scenarios that may involve the military medical force.

Exciting and thought-provoking speakers invited to participate include subject matter experts in expeditionary medicine, naval environmental and preventative medicine, disaster management, and humanitarian assistance.

Interested personnel may contact HMC Ronda Carr, (847) 688-2793 or DSN 792-2793 or by email at carrrr@cnrf.nola.navy.mil for additional information.

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MN010705. NMCP shows off at health and fitness expo
By JO2 Duke Richardson

Naval Medical Center Portsmouth recent participation in the "Health and Fitness Expo" was the perfect opportunity for NMCP to reach out to the local Hampton Roads community about the importance of living and maintaining a healthy body and mind. With an attendance of over 25,000, the expo is one of the largest health outreach events under one roof.

With the largest military catchment area of more than 420,000 beneficiaries, NMCP has a strong presence in the regional healthcare arena. LT David K. Hamilton, MSC, department head of NMCP Marketing, says NMCP's first involvement with the expo was an outstanding way to show the Hampton Roads community exactly what the hospital is all about.

"We (had) tons of information available on accessing care here at NMCP and about the services we have available to our beneficiaries," Hamilton said.

NMCP had a booth set up where interested people could go and receive various booklets and advice on ways to live healthier and longer.

"This two day informational event allowed NMCP personnel to counsel beneficiaries on TRICARE benefits, nutrition, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, negative effects of sedentary lifestyle, and ways to improve self-care" said CDR York-Slagle, head of NMCP's Health Promotions Department.

The work and energy expended to participate in the expo paid off greatly as the public also learned first-hand that military medical excellence is not limited to just providing treatment for the ill. Wellness and illness prevention is also an important aspect military healthcare.

"We do a lot of education. We teach people to take better care of themselves," said HN Akim Lekuti, a symposium participant.

"NMCP's booth was one of the anchors at the expo that drew the greatest crowds," declared NMCP's director of Managed Care, CAPT Gene Barron.

Thousands of people went to the two-day expo and had the chance to get tips and pointers on ways to live a healthy lifestyle. Thanks to NMCP's and the involvement of local vendors and exhibitors, it is safe to say that no one left feeling empty headed when it came to knowing how to live healthier.

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MN010706. Medical Symposium hosted for Japanese Dignitaries
By Bill Doughty, U.S. Naval Hospital, Yokosuka, Japan

When subspecialty care is not available at U.S. Naval Hospital Yokosuka, patients must be either medevaced or treated at a Japanese health care facility. Recently, top executives from some of those facilities visited the Yokosuka base. They were given a briefing by hospital commanding officer CAPT Jack Smith. Then they toured the hospital and USS KITTY HAWK (CV 63).

According to Yokosuka's managed care department head, LCDR Paul Toland, everyone was very interested in learning about the facility, the ship and the base.

"As we toured the hospital and ship, I saw a lot of smiles on people's faces and heard a lot of excellent questions asked," Toland said. "And we enjoyed the opportunity to present them both our capabilities and limitations."

Japanese healthcare facilities frequently provide assistance to the U.S. naval hospital in the areas of cardiology, neonatal intensive care, neurosurgery, and even some routine radiology diagnostic services such as MRIs. The tour of USS KITTY HAWK helped the executives and senior physicians see how their support helps the Fleet maintain its readiness.

"Their part with the Fleet is critical because the Fleet knows that many of their patients are out there," said Toland. "We have patients in Japanese hospitals, in very serious or critical condition from ships here in Yokosuka, so it's important to maintain that good relationship."

The dignitaries received a detailed tour of the ship's medical spaces by LT David Baptista, medical administration officer. They also toured the bridge of the HAWK, and got a perspective from the flight deck.

According to Ms. Yumiko Okuno, healthcare specialist in the Managed Care Department, The dignitaries were amazed at the high technology on board the KITTY HAWK.

"They enjoyed the jet display on board and were impressed with everything they had in that limited area. And so many people working on the ship..." Okuno said.

Dr. Isao Yamamoto, professor of Neurosurgery at Yokohama City University Hospital, said, "I am very very excited to see the KITTY HAWK, particularly the medical system and the O.R."

Ms. Okuno said the symposium helps the hospital and the community.

"It was so effective to provide mutual understanding and to get to meet many people," she said. "Now they know what we have here and we learned what they have there -- the capabilities each of the hospitals have. I believe our staff was amazed how well each of them speaks English."

"They learned a lot about us, military medicine, about the U.S. military itself from the presentation CAPT Smith provided," she added. "It provided them with valuable information and an idea of the Yokosuka Naval Base."

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MN010707. Healthwatch: Regular dental visits make kids smile
By LT George Kang DDS Branch Dental Clinic, Yokosuka, Japan

Regular visits to the dentist are an important part of your children's health care regimen. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends dental check-ups at least twice a year for most children. (For some children who are at an increased risk for tooth decay, 3 to 4-month check up intervals are required. Follow your dentist's advice on these special cases.)

The regular dental visits are not just a way to check for cavities. At each visit, your dentist will do a thorough evaluation of the teeth and gums and start an ongoing assessment of changes in your child's mouth. As your

child grows, many changes take place in the form of skeletal growth and erupting baby and adult teeth. With regular dental visits, severe malocclusions (or crooked teeth) can be detected early in your child's development. These problems are caused by abnormal skeletal growth patterns or a severe lack of space.

How does your child perceive the dentist? That depends on you, the parent, more than anyone else in his or her lives. Try to paint a positive picture of the dentist as a friendly person who is there to help them. Many fears that a child brings to the dental clinic are actually reflections on how their parents feel about dentists. Most importantly, regular dental visits help to create trust between your child and the dentist. The more "friendly" visits your child has at the dental clinic, the less apprehension they will have.

Prevention is the key! Regular dental visits, which may prevent tooth decay, can save time in the long run and improve a person's quality of life. Children with healthy mouths are able to eat a variety of foods without discomfort and thus gain more nutrients from the foods they eat. With a healthy mouth, children tend to have better overall health. A disease in the mouth (toothache or chronic abscess) can lead to fever, fatigue and lethargy in a child. A healthy mouth is more attractive, giving your child confidence in their appearance. Remember preventive dentistry with regular dental visits means a healthy smile for a happy child.

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Comments and ideas for MEDNEWS are welcome. Story Submissions are highly encouraged. Contact MEDNEWS editor, At email: mednews@us.med.Navy.mil; telephone 202-762-3218, (DSN) 762, or fax 202-762-3224.